

11/08/2002

Opportunity missed for MCA to air its views on use of English

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THE contentious issue of whether English should be used to teach Science and Mathematics in Chinese and Tamil schools next year continued to rage in the vernacular newspapers last week.

The Berita Harian and Utusan Malaysia also touched at various points during the week on Singapore's dramatic unveiling of its latest bottled product, Newater, and its implications on bilateral relations.

Yesterday saw the Berita Harian carrying a related report on Page 1 which highlighted the fact that MCA representatives were conspicuously absent at a Barisan Nasional Youth meeting convened on Friday to discuss the issue.

The meeting went on to endorse the Government's proposal in principle with Umno Youth education bureau chief Dr Adham Baba saying that he was in the dark as to why MCA Youth representatives were absent.

Contacted by the Berita Harian later, MCA Youth chief Datuk Ong Tee Keat said the party's Youth wing had not received an invitation to the meeting.

The issue assumed an air of mystery as Dr Adham had earlier told the Press that invitations had been sent to all BN component party Youth wings.

The MCA's absence assumes greater intrigue given the fact that party chief Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik had urged the authorities to keep discussions on the topic open despite Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's assertion that a decision had already been made on the matter.

It was an opportunity missed for the MCA to openly air its stand on the matter, a fact alluded to obliquely by Dr Adham who said that all who attended the meeting went on record with their respective positions.

The Berita Harian had, in an editorial on Tuesday, broached the subject of how some groups were still resisting efforts to unite the races 45 years after independence.

Claiming they were living in a world of their own, the newspaper said the groups did not want to share their views with others for reasons best known to them.

While acknowledging that the Chinese held culture and language close to their heart, the Berita Harian said it could not accept the community's general rejection of anything proposed for national-type Chinese primary schools.

The Berita Harian suggested that the MCA and Gerakan, the two largest parties representing the Chinese in the Barisan Nasional, actively try to correct the misinterpretation of the move to expand use of English in all schools.

The Chinese and Tamil newspapers also went to town with the China Press, worrying that the issue would escalate into something more serious.

The Sin Chew Jit Poh quoted Human Resources Minister Datuk Dr Fong Chan Onn as saying that the MCA, other Chinese-based political parties and Chinese education groups would meet soon to discuss the issue.

The Tamil Nesan, in an editorial that skirted the issue of use of Tamil in schools, urged the Education Ministry to provide a guarantee that the use of Tamil would be continued in national schools.

Meanwhile, the Utusan Malaysia made no attempt to be diplomatic with its pointed heading for the story on Newater: "Singapore using Newater to pressure Malaysia."

Its reporter, Zulkiflee Bakar, said in a commentary yesterday that Malaysia was not playing to Singapore's tune on the issue of the supply of water to the republic.

Alluding to Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's statement that Singapore could stop buying water immediately from Malaysia instead of waiting for the 2011 deal to expire, he said it showed that the Prime Minister was sending a clear a message to the republic.

Dr Mahathir's terse reply to the Singapore statement that the republic would not renew the deal after 2011 was an apt response to the Singapore Government which wanted everyone to do as it willed, Zulkifli added.

The writer ended his diatribe against Singapore with an analogy of a traveller in a desert choosing water from a hole in the ground rather than drinking clean water given by a friend.